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# DECORATION & FURNITURE

## THE PROVINCIAL ART GALLERY.

### PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR ITS CONSTRUCTION AND ARRANGEMENT.

**A**SIGNIFICANT token that the interest in artistic matters, which for the last ten years has been a marked feature in almost every part of the country, is something more than an artistic mania, and, consequently, a passing phase, is evidenced by the numbers of small but permanent collections which are in process of formation.

As soon as the means will permit, a home is sought for the collection. The first impulse is to model after the art galleries in the larger cities. Not infrequently a well-appointed and organized art collection in a Western city with the prairie at the door will be found sandwiched between business houses in a "Palace Block" on the most crowded thoroughfare in the town.

So long as the collection is housed in rented rooms this may be the necessary thing. But the moment a permanent home becomes possible, the heart of the town in any place of moderate size should be abandoned and art and business seek separate directions. If no æsthetic reasons prompt this, one of the first considerations, the dangers by fire, should do so.

Some of the smaller New England towns have modest little art galleries that might well serve as models. Notable among them is that of the Portland Art League. Some are combined with libraries and reading-rooms, as at Concord and Pittsfield, Mass. These are away from the noise and the bustle of affairs, in quiet little temples of their own.

The first step should be to secure a suitable building lot in a desirable situation—desirability comprehending appropriate surroundings and quiet, combined with accessibility. On this ground the art gallery should stand an isolated building, since with isolation goes not only safety, but a margin of land that may add to its attractiveness and permit of its extension which comes in time.

In small galleries of this sort—that of the Portland Art League cost \$2200—the architecture should be without pretension. I have seen the miniature temple and clipped editions of the Parthenon serve this purpose, but prefer more domestic architecture, since this not only "goes" better with our landscape but is better adapted to our customs—the latter is a consideration not to be ignored. On the other hand one may urge the unfitness of the bric-à-brac architecture which, masquerading under the name of Queen Anne, is undignified and unworthy the serious purpose that underlies the rearing of a home to art. Either extreme is to be avoided.

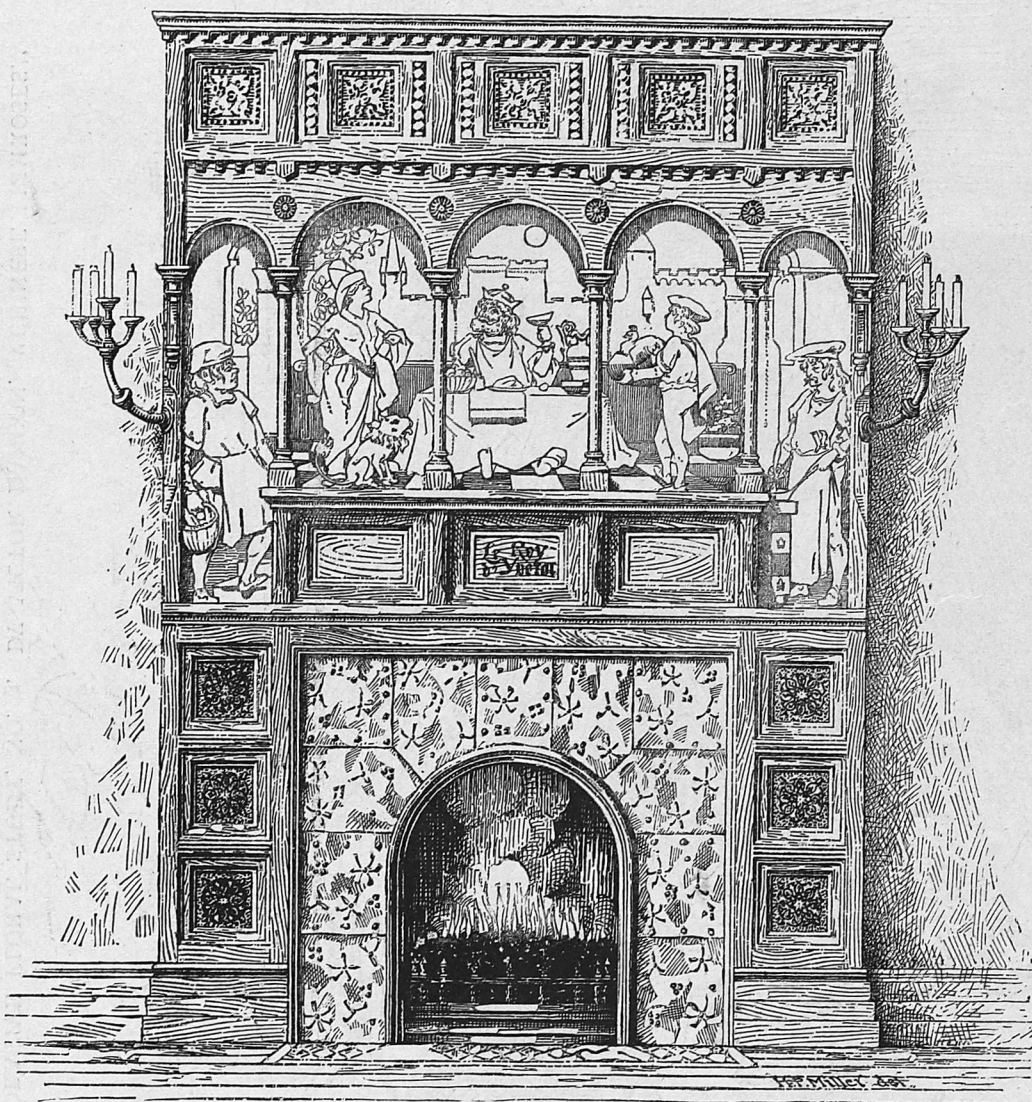
at least three main rooms. One should be a reading-room where may be found the current art publications; another an office and conversation or reception-room combined, and the third and principal room the art gallery. Whatever picturesqueness, quaintness or piquancy may be desirable in the architecture should find expression in the reading and reception-rooms, which should overlook the street, and there side-lights in windows may be introduced at discretion. In the interior also, broken lines, corners, projections, sloping eaves are not amiss. But let the art gallery be remote from the entrance; let it be symmetrical and lighted only from the roof.

Of the size of the gallery, to be determined somewhat of course on the probable increase of the collection, each town must be its own judge. The probability is that this room will for some time accommodate such paintings, drawings, etchings, photographs, casts, and other objects of art as the association may own. It will be for the trustees or the curator to decide how the space is to be distributed in relation to the various departments; but something may be said in a general way on the subject, by way of suggestion.

There is usually a tendency to make the skylight too large. A light too glaring is not so great an evil as a light not strong enough; but it is an objection, and the skylight must be provided with shades to modify the glare on sunny days.

It is the experience of all galleries that for relief of art works no color equals dark red, nearer maroon than crimson; the richer the texture the better. Felt is sometimes used, but it is too expensive except for inclosed cases. Merino is admirable and cheap. Canton flannel is cheap and effective, but it is as inflammable as tinder, and should not be used; a single spark will ignite it. Temporarily, the color may be washed on the roughly plastered wall.

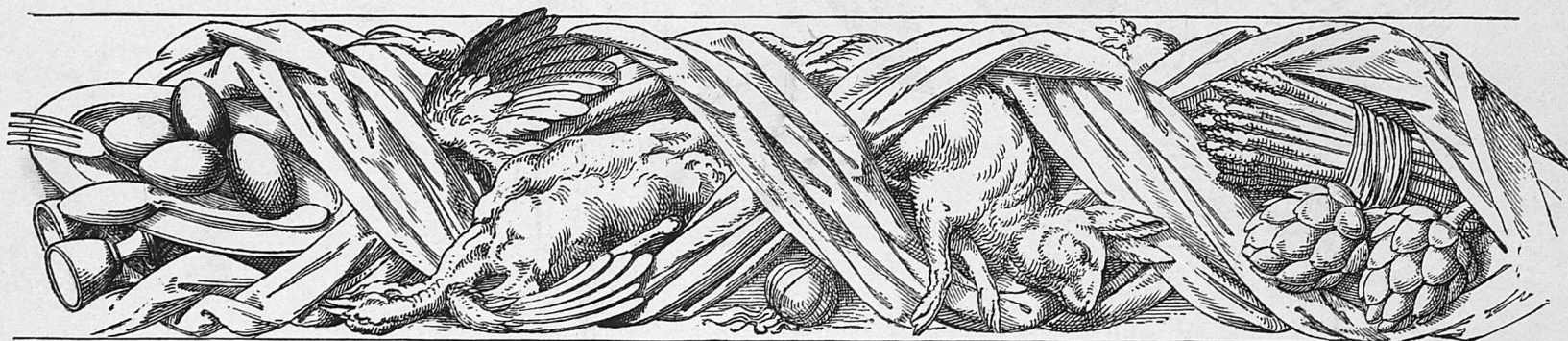
Let us suppose half the wall space in the gallery allotted to pictures. The other half may be provided with cases, which, in lieu of other objects of art, may hold engravings, etchings and photographs, if it is not desirable to frame them, or small casts and busts. The



CHESTNUT MANTEL IN THE DINING-ROOM OF W. H. NEWBOLD, PHILADELPHIA.

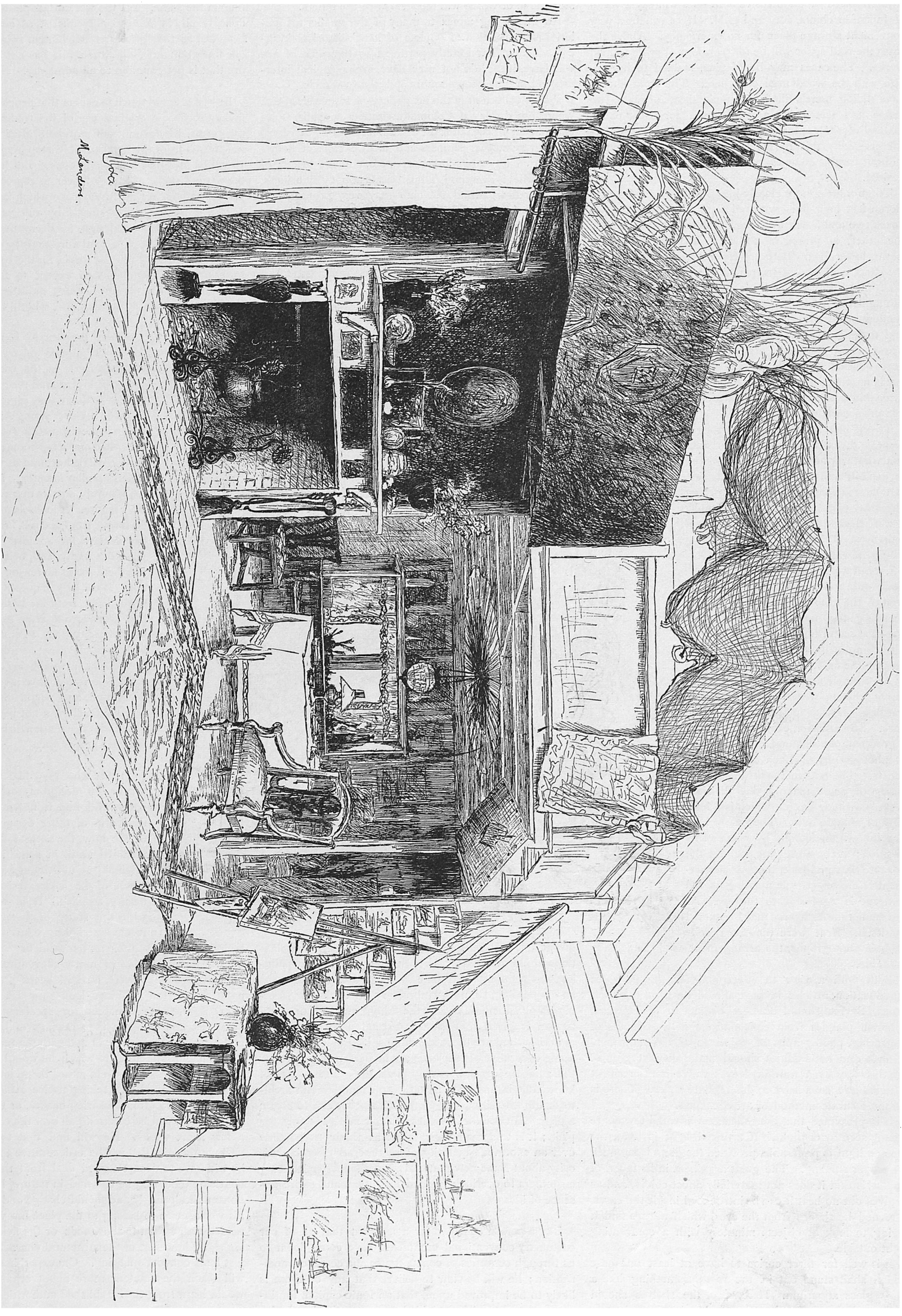
DESIGNED BY C. M. BURNS, JR. (THE PAINTED TAPESTRY PICTURE BY R. ARTHUR WAS PUBLISHED IN THE ART AMATEUR, NOV., 1826.)

The simplest form of an art gallery that shall serve the needs of a small place for a period, say, of ten years, and that can be built of frame and shingles for \$3000—as the outside limit should be—is a one-story structure with



MOTIVE FOR A DINING-ROOM FRIEZE OR PAINTED PANEL DECORATION.





STUDIO OF MRS. C. B. COMAN, IN KEENE VALLEY, N. Y.

PEN DRAWING BY MISS M. LANDERS, OF CLINTON, N. Y., SHOWN AT THE RECENT ARCHITECTURAL LEAGUE EXHIBITION.

cases should be at least four feet high and two feet deep, and mounted to the height of a dado from the floor. The space below may be screened off by a straight piece of unobtrusive stuff—we will say a width of Japanese chintz, écru and gold. Here will be a very convenient storage place for an emergency. Above the cases the wall space will be for paintings or other framed works. The cases may be of pine, stained to harmonize with the wood used elsewhere. The front should have sliding panels filled with plain sheets of glass, two and a half feet being a good width for each panel. Instead of shelves inside the cases, have boxes of different sizes. By this means the cases can be arranged without trouble so as to permit of any sort of display desired.

To go a little more closely into detail—granted a case eleven feet long lined with red felt: First we have two boxes two and a half feet long. One, a foot higher than the other, is placed in the rear, and in front of it is the lower box. Both are covered with red felt, and the effect is of two steps reaching within six inches of the front of the case.

The next division in line with these is a series of four shallow boxes three feet long carried higher in the rear and making a series of steps descending to the front. These, as all the boxes, are covered with red felt. The next division is one large box two feet square. The last is another series of graduated boxes three and a half feet long and arranged like the second division.

This is merely an arbitrary arrangement, and, as is seen, can be varied to suit whatever articles it may be desired to exhibit, and if need be any division can be rearranged without disturbing any other part. Suppose, for example, it were desired to exhibit a collection of red vases. In that case the red lining would be valueless for purposes of relief. But a piece of "old gold" can be hung on a rod as a curtain on the rear wall of the case and, laid over the descending steps made by the boxes and the vases, afford perfect relief without disturbing or interfering with any other part of the case.

Another advantage is in allowing different objects special prominence regardless of what else may be in the case. Suppose, for example, we have a group of old Satsuma, or a collection of photographs of Luca della Robbia reliefs. The Satsuma is arranged on a series of steps making one division. Next is a single box on which is a lofty vase or antique bust. The vase or bust has its own distinction by virtue of its position; at the same time it bars the delicate Satsuma from the next department. The effect—the massing of the pottery—is agreeable to the eye. At the same time each piece may be studied by itself. If it were the Luca della Robbia photographs, the arrangement would be equally valuable.

Both with a view to effect and for the purposes of education, articles in kind should be kept together. Thus, Sèvres should be kept distinct from Dresden, Moorish plaques from cloisonné enamels. Schools of engraving, photographs of paintings of different men, periods and nationalities should make distinct groups. In this way even untrained eyes will catch the salient features and soon learn to differentiate styles. There is no more subtle method of art education.

It is presumed that the collections in small towns are chiefly seen by daylight. If artificial light is used, the electric light is preferable, provided the glare is subdued by proper shading. The great argument in its favor, of course, is that it does not materially affect colors, and as it gives out no heat it can be introduced inside the cases, screened by shades from the eyes, which always find it trying to look at objects minutely with a confronting light outside.

It is well for rarer curios to have at least one case which shall stand out in the room, something like a lofty glass aquarium. Here, also, the shelves should be irregularly arranged. On one side there may be two narrow glass shelves on which small articles can be seen close at hand, and a third reaching half the length

through. On the other side may be one narrow shelf near the top, and the rest of the space is left free. This arrangement will accommodate a number of objects of different sizes, none of which will interfere with the others.

An interesting annex to many of the smaller art galleries is a collection of objects of local historical interest, which, if not exactly pertinent to the cause of art, will have, if they do not now have, archaeological interest, and in time become more and more valuable. There is such a collection in the art gallery of Pittsfield, Mass., where are displayed Colonial invitations to balls, Colonial muster rolls, uniforms, drums, and tattered ensigns, great-grandmother slippers and laces, scraps of homespun from log-cabin looms, etc., etc. In the history of towns, what is everybody's business is nobody's business, and a well-organized art club may very properly add this care of local traditions to other cares in the interest of posterity.

In conclusion, do not consider an art gallery properly equipped without at least a half dozen camp-chairs.

M. G. HUMPHREYS.

#### NOTES ON DECORATION.

THE rage for mere novelties continues, and seems to be unappeasable, so that a well-known firm of decorators finds it profitable to pay a man to do nothing but



SUGGESTION FOR AN UPRIGHT PIANO.

FROM AN ITALIAN PAINTING OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY, IN THE INDUSTRIAL MUSEUM, BERLIN.

invent new materials for decorating and new combinations of old materials. As in the days when an oil-painting was popularly held to be a work of art because it was an oil-painting, so, now, embroidery on leather or painting on plush is held to be "the thing," and little or no attention is given to design or execution so long as the materials used are those demanded by the latest craze. Some decorative art societies are in part responsible for this; but their members may plead the excuse of lack of knowledge of anything better. So cannot certain architects and artists, who do more than any one else to create a depraved taste for novelties. Their motive is only too plain; it is to spread their talent as thinly as possible over an enormous quantity of remunerative work, curiosity about some new material or method often inducing customers to overlook hurried execution and entire absence of ideas.

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LET a person consider for a moment that all of our customary conventional ornaments have come down to us through centuries of constant use and constant modification; he will be slow to believe that any of these is likely to be improved upon, that an Ionic capital, for instance, may acquire an added grace at the hand of a modern architect. All that can really be done with such well-known forms, is to adapt them each time to the

places which they are to beautify. The proportions, the boldness of the relief, the color, not only may, but should be changed in every case; but the essential form must remain the same. Yet the work of adaptation, when well done, results in an originality almost as decided and as beautiful as that of a well-knit human frame, which no one finds uninteresting although it has not a single feature that is not common to all humanity.

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BUT, if it is too much to expect that people will learn to make proper and original use of the traditional decorative forms, why cannot our searchers after novelty take new forms from the inexhaustible storehouse of nature? It will be said that it is being done. But how? Either the natural shape of leaf or flower is reproduced as in a picture without regard to the place which it is to occupy, or else it is "conventionalized" by rule of thumb. In either case there is no design, no decorative idea. The decorator should have in mind a distinctly formulated need. He should say: "I want a cornice for this room, a border for that panel;" he may, then, expect to find in nature something which, modified, much or little, repeated or interchanged with something else, will fill his need.

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IT is a not uncommon practice in some European countries to lead a vine or a plant of ivy into a room through a hole made on purpose in the window-casing, and to train it around the room, next the ceiling, so that it may serve for a natural cornice. A clever young American lady, who had seen something of the sort, has decorated one of her rooms with a painted vine carried around at the top of the walls in similar manner. It is natural—too natural; but, as decoration, it is an utter failure. It looks as though intended for a "trompe d'œil," though it does not deceive for an instant. It fits its place but badly, and, being a work of art, there seems no reason why it should not. If the lady in question had simply taken a hint from the natural vine and had worked out, after several experimental essays, say in charcoal, on the wall itself, the exact combination of leaf forms which would look best in her room, she would have invented a novel decoration, and would discover, when she had finished, if not before, that she had been conventionalizing nature in the only proper way.

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THOSE who may like to begin the practice of designing ornament after nature will find it necessary to study the works of other designers in order to see how the natural forms may be modified until, in some instances, the original is not distinguishable, although much of its characteristic grace or beauty remains. It is well to begin with the study of Japanese art, but forms so slightly conventionalized as

theirs are hardly suitable for our solid, or seemingly solid, houses. The Persian is more conventional, while, in his treatment of flowers, he still keeps pretty close to nature. Let the beginner look over his back numbers of *The Art Amateur* for specimens of Persian ornament and compare the drawings of jonquils, pinks and hyacinths which he will find with the real plants. If, then, he knows of a use to which he would put a lot of old Persian tiles, if he could afford them, let him paint a similar set himself, only taking native American plants, such as the dicentra, the spring beauty, or the dog-tooth violet, which will be blooming all over the country within a few short weeks. He will find that to fill his tile well with a form that will be as decorative as the Persian, he will have to depart a good deal from the most symmetrical model that he can find in nature, but he should do so unhesitatingly and should change and change until his work seems to belong to the place for which it is intended rather than to the woods or the fields, never losing sight, however, of the structural character of the object he is conventionalizing. One experiment of this sort will teach the amateur more about ornament than he would learn from the established authorities in an age.

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If the experimenter cannot draw well free-hand, a simple apparatus which any carpenter can make for him